ميكام
مركز ميريان
للدراسات المتقدمة
في المنطقة المغاربية

MECAM
Merian Centre
For Advanced Studies
In The Maghreb

MECAM

Fellows' Study Day

Imagining the Future
through Stories and Margins:
Dealing with Disparity

Tunis, December 4th, 2026

Venue:
Faculté des Sciences Humaines et Sociales de Tunis / Université de Tunis
Coordination:
Faten Bouchrara, MECAM Fellows coordinator tunis@staff.uni-marburg.de

04.12.26		
	MORNING SESSIONS	**Faculté des Sciences Humaines et Sociales De Tunis (FSHST)** Boulevard 9 avril, Tunis
9.00 – 9.10 **9.10 – 9.25** **9.25 – 9.30**	Opening of the Study Day: Participants Welcome Welcome by MECAM directors & the Dean of the Faculty Introduction to the study day by a representative of the fellows	
9.30 – 10.10	**Block I – Stories :** First pitch session ((6 presenters × 5 min each, + 10 min buffer for delays and technical issues) first discussion round	
10.10 – 10.40	Discussant: Olaf Müller; then open discussion	
10.40 – 11.20 **11.20 – 12.30**	**Block II – Margins :** second pitch session (6 presenters × 5 min each, + 10 min buffer for delays and technical issues) Second discussion round Comments from advisory and scientific board members, PIs Discussant: Olaf Müller; then open discussion	
12:30 **13:45**	**MIDDAY BREAK: Networking Snacks**	
	AFTERNOON SESSIONS	
14.00 – 15.00 **15.00 –15.30** **16:00**	Lecture by Hendrik Ziegler Discussion with Hendrik Ziegler Closure of the day: open discussion, on the lecture and on the MECAM.	

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THEMATIC AREAS FOR THE PITCHES

Block I: STORIES

Dr. Fidelia Danielle Renne: Informal Spaces and Environmental Mobilisation in Southern Tunisia
Dr. Yasser Rhimi: Tunisian Environmental Imagination: A Post-Revolution Perspective
Dr. Hanene Baroumi: Rotten Futures
Dr. Sana BenAli-Taga: Acoustic Stories: Abd al-Aziz al-Aroui's Radio Folktales as Postcolonial Resistance
Dr. Amany Alsiefy: Masculinities and Femininities in Algerian and Tunisian Fiction
Dr. Houssem Chachia: Representations of the Past and Morisco History

Block II: MARGINS

Dr. Maya Ben Ayed: Tunisian Animation: A History from Below
Dr. Fatma Abdelkaoui: Involuntary Im/mobility and Youth Inequality
Dr. Hassan Ould Moctar: Migration Discourse in Mauritania and the Kadahin
Dr. Amalia Dragani: From Camp to University: A Tuareg Intellectual
Dr. Daniele Cantini: Mobility of Researchers and Knowledge
Dr. Florian Keller: The Cultural Journal 15*21

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PROJECTS

Abdelkaoui Fatma

Title:
Involuntary im/mobility and youth inequality in the Maghreb

Abstract:
This project studies how young people in the urban peripheries who want to move but are blocked experience inequality, and how they imagine their futures.

Short Biography:
Fatma Abdelkaoui is an Assistant Professor of Economics at the Mediterranean School of Business, South Mediterranean University (SMU), Tunisia, and a MECAM fellow. She holds a PhD in Economics from IHEC Carthage. Her research covers economic development, innovation and economic fluctuations, the digital economy, and financial economics, with published work on innovation systems, institutional quality, poverty and inequality, cryptocurrency, and technology transfer. She also studies digital labour, AI adoption, and migration in North Africa and the wider MENA region. At MECAM, she is working on her research project "Involuntary Im/mobility and Youth Inequality in the Maghreb: Urban Peripheries in the Maghreb"

Amany Alsiefy

Title:
Representations of Masculinities and Femininities in Postcolonial Algerian and Tunisian Fiction: Power Relations and Gender Dynamics

Abstract:
This presentation discusses how Habib Selmi's The Women of al-Basatin and Saïd Khatibi's The End of the Sahara explore the enduring influence of traditional values and beliefs in postcolonial Algeria and Tunisia. It considers

how these tensions shape gender relations and inform the construction of diverse forms of masculinity. Focusing on the interplay between formal and informal structures of power, the presentation analyses representations of authority exercised by politicians, police officers, and lawyers, alongside the less institutionalized forms of power wielded by economically marginalized individuals, sometimes through violence. By bringing these representations into dialogue, it highlights how power, gender, and social marginalization intersect in the negotiation of tradition and modernity.

Short Biography:
Amany Alsiefy is a MECAM Fellow at the Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (Philipps-Universität Marburg/Université de Tunis), Senior Editor of Open Cultural Studies (De Gruyter Brill), and formerly a lecturer at the Centre for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies (ZtG), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research explores representations of the body and articulations of the modern public sphere in postcolonial literature and culture, with a particular focus on gender, masculinities, secularization, and fashion theory. She is the author of Modern Egyptian Women, Fashion, and Faith: Discourses and Representations (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, German ed., 2026), and co-editor of the forthcoming volume Matrilineal Family Saga Beyond Western Modernity (Leiden University Press, May 2027).

Daniele Cantini

Title:
How to study mobility of researchers and the knowledge they produce, and why it matters

Abstract:
In this short presentation, I will specifically focus on the Tunisian case, and present some of the key results on student and researcher mobility, before concluding by focusing on the main difficulties still to be solved.

Short Biography:

Daniele Cantini is a social anthropologist, with more than 20 years of research experience in several Arab countries (Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, among others). He published Youth and Education in the Middle East: Shaping Identity and Politics in Jordan (London, 2016), and recently co-edited a volume on Social Anthropology in the Arab World: the fragmented history of an uncomfortable discipline (English 2025, French 2026, both in open access).

Fidelia Danielle Renne:

Title:
Between the Square and the Café: Informal Spaces, Information Exchange, and the Rhetoric of Environmental Mobilisation in Southern Tunisia

Abstract:
How do communities in resource-affected regions articulate alternative futures, navigate internal diversity, and resist the reproduction of extractive inequalities? This project investigates longstanding environmental activism in southern Tunisia. The local environmental movement contests industrial projects not only on distributive grounds but also by invoking claims to 'place' and stewardship of nature. Combining participatory, visual, and survey methods, the project explores how community-based processes shape credibility, circulate information, and navigate internal diversity in order to articulate a collective voice.

Short biography:
Fidelia Danielle Renne is a Research Associate in the Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR) at the University of Oxford and a Lecturer at King's College London, Department of Political Economy. Her research examines social movements and community development, with particular attention to associational life, friendship, identity negotiation, and political engagement in the Global South.

Florian Keller

Title:
The Tunisian Cultural Journal 15*21: Between Progressivism and Liberation Theology

Abstract:
In my presentation, I will use one or two title pages to highlight the main themes and points of reference of the periodical 15*21 and demonstrate its relevance to my work. I will then introduce, as briefly as possible, the argument that the magazine served as the site for a broader debate in Tunisia and the Maghreb at large—one that radically questioned its own traditions and conditions of existence.

Short Biography:
Florian Keller recently defended his PhD in history at Freie Universität Berlin. His doctoral research at the Berlin-based graduate programme Global Intellectual History (GIH) examined foundational debates in postcolonial social science and sociology in Tunisia and Algeria. In his research, he is interested in exploring intellectual history, particularly that of the Maghreb

Hanene Baroumi

Title:
Rotten Futures: Animality, Madness, and Post-Revolutionary Affect in Maghrebean Literary and Cultural Representations

Abstract:
My presentation examines how selected works of post-Arab Spring Maghrebian literature reimagine the aftermath of the Arab Spring through the intertwined figures of animality and madness, foregrounding the political, affective, and ethical dimensions of revolutionary experiences. Emerging from the widespread circulation of animal metaphors and mad subjects across political discourse, popular culture, and literary production after 2011, the study examines how literary texts from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Libya grapple with unresolved violence, political disappointment, and rotten

futures.

Short Biography :
Hanene Baroumi is a fellow at MECAM, University of Tunis, and an Assistant Professor of English Literature at the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences of Tunis, University of Tunis. She holds a PhD in English Literature from Manouba University and an MA in Cross-Cultural Poetics from the University of Carthage. Her research explores how contemporary Maghrebian literature rethinks the affective and political aftermath of the Arab uprisings through the intertwined figures of madness and animality, read through postcolonial and affect theory.

Hassan Ould Moctar

Title:
On the resonances between contemporary migration discourse in Mauritania and during the period of the Kadahin

Abstract:
This brief presentation discusses the resonance between contemporary migration discourse in Mauritania and the late 1960s and early 1970s, when an underground leftist movement, called the Kadahin, exercised significant influence upon national debate and policy on a range of issues. It does so by first introducing the contemporary migration policy context in Mauritania before highlighting key similarities between public discourse in this contemporary context and that to which the Kadahin contributed. It concludes with a reflection upon distinctions between these two moments.

Short biography:
Hassan Ould Moctar is a Fellow at MECAM, University of Tunis, and a Research Associate at the Centre for Migration and Diaspora Studies at SOAS, University of London. He obtained his PhD in Development Studies from SOAS in 2021 and has since held fellowships in the SOAS Development Studies Department and in the LSE Department of International Development. Prior to joining MECAM, he was a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at SOAS.

Houssem Eddine Chachia

Title:
Why Do We Need to Understand Representations of the Past in the Present? The Case of Morisco History

Abstract:
This short presentation explores how the reappropriation of the past in the present offers a way to understand how peoples construct and negotiate their historical imaginaries, whether national, communal, or collective. Drawing on the case of Morisco history, it examines how the uses of the past shape contemporary identities and perceptions of the other. It also considers how historical narratives inform visions of the present and expectations of the future. Ultimately, it argues that understanding the uses of the past is essential to understanding how societies define themselves and their place in the world.

Short biography:
Houssem Eddine Chachia is an Associate Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Tunis, and is a MECAM Long-Term Fellow (2026–2029). His research focuses on Moriscos, Sephardic Jews, and Mediterranean history, particularly migration, exile, and identity in the Maghreb. He is the author of The Morisco Landscape, which received the Sheikh Zayed Book Award in 2024. He was a Visiting Associate Professor at Harvard University (2025–2026).

Maya Ben Ayed

Title:
Animer une autre histoire : le film d'animation tunisien comme témoin et contre-narratif. (Animating another history. Tunisian Animated Film as a Witness and a Counter-Narrative).

Abstract:

This project approaches the history of animated film in Tunisia not as

restitution but as a way of understanding the present, treating Tunisian animation as a total object read through the prism of transnational dynamics. Long marginal to art, cinema and the academy, animation tells history from below, against the official storytelling of those in power: as witness and counter-narrative, it opens a cultural, political and social history of Tunisia and the region.

Short biography:
Maya Ben Ayed is a Fellow at MECAM, University of Tunis and an associate researcher at the Centre d'Histoire Sociale (Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne / CNRS). Her research on animated film, first in Tunisia and now across the Arab world, traces the history of this art as well as that of the societies that produce it, shedding light on major historical transformations, past and ongoing. She is the author of Le cinéma d'animation en Tunisie (1965-1995) (L'Harmattan, 2019).

Sana BenAli-Taga

Title:
Acoustic Stories: Abd al-Aziz al-Aroui's Radio Folktales as Postcolonial Resistance

Abstract:
This project analyzes the radio-broadcast tales of Abd-al-Aziz al-Aroui (1898-1971), the pioneering Tunisian storyteller, as a heteroglossic site of transition. Al-Aroui's broadcasts remediate oral folktales for mass media, hence preserving collective memory while addressing a modernizing nation's systemic disparities. These hybrid tales rely on borrowing processes while having an distinctive aesthetic imprint that distinguishes them from the 'original' narratives. My aim is to examine the structural transformation of these traditional narratives that al-Aroui utilized on national radio.

Short Biography:

Sana' BenAli-Taga is an Assistant Professor of English at the Faculty of Letters,

Arts, and Humanities of Manouba, Tunisia. Her research explores the intersections of narrative theory and cultural practices in areas such as oral folklore. She also publishes on ecofeminist frameworks and mythic reformulations. She actively brings local epistemologies into conversation with transregional academic networks like NeMLA, encouraging shared approaches on narratives of resistance and restorative memory.

Yasser Rhimi

Title:
Tunisian Environmental Imagination: A Post-Revolution Perspective

Abstract:
The presentation seeks to address the crucial performative change in Tunisians' environmental imagination in the post-revolutionary (2011) period. By examining a few selected visual and non-visual works, narratives, and/or experiences from present-day Tunisia, the study will mark, and by extension, foreground the rise of a Tunisian post-revolutionary (2011) ecological "awareness", and activism (particularly, amongst the youth) against the backdrop of a postcolonial past that has long fed on Tunisians' environmental passivity and/or indifference.

Short Biography:
Yasser Rhimi is currently an Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies and International Relations at the Higher Institute of Human Sciences of Tunis, Tunis El-Manar University, Tunisia. His PhD from the University of Manouba, Tunisia, approached the cultural origins of our contemporary global environmental crisis. As of 2010, Rhimi has developed a special interest in ecological criticism and post-humanism, which he has applied to different research fields and teaching areas and while participating in conferences and workshops of the Tunisian Departments of English. Today, he works on developing his own theory and concepts of ecological awareness in the Maghreb.

Amalia Dragani

Title:
From Camp to University: Trajectories of Education and Mobility among a Tuareg Intellectual between Niger, Tunisia and the Mashreq

Abstract:
This paper traces the biography of a Tuareg man from a camp in central Niger who, in the late 1950s, travelled to Tunisia to pursue university studies, subsequently continuing his education in Mashreq. He later became one of the first university professors of Arabic language. Shortly before his recent passing, I had the opportunity to meet and film him for several hours during a stay in Niamey.
The footage collected forms the starting point for a reflection on the biographical trajectories of those Tuareg figures who, from the end of the colonial period onwards, pursued their studies abroad, particularly in Arab countries. Through this case study, the paper examines the ways in which such educational trajectories contributed to the emergence of new intellectual figures, to changing relationships with Arabic languages and forms of knowledge, and to the transformation of Tuareg elites in the postcolonial Sahara and Sahel.
The contribution thus forms part of a broader reconstruction of histories of mobility, education and the circulation of knowledge across the Saharo-Sahelian space and the Arab world.

Short Biography:
Amalia Dragani is a social anthropologist with a PhD from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). Her research focuses on the Sahara-Sahel, based on extensive fieldwork among Tuareg communities in Niger, Mali, and Algeria, as well as among their diasporas in Africa and Europe. She studies poetic creativity, intangible cultural heritage, oneiric inspiration, and intellectual, artistic, and political elites, as well as gender and mixed marriages; more recently, she has worked on Muslim-to-Christian conversion

and Saharan student mobilities.

She was a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Laboratory of Political Anthropology (CNRS–EHESS), with a secondment at the University of Johannesburg (2024–2026), following a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellowship (2020–2023) involving the University of Florida and KU Leuven. She has received research funding from Sorbonne Université, the Musée du Quai Branly, and the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence (Germany). In addition to her academic work, she makes short films. She is currently General Secretary of APAD (Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development).